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Introduction to the Thematic Section

This issue of *Colloquia Humanistica* focuses on the subject of *the Centre-periphery relation and the formation of collective and individual identities in the Balkans and Central Europe*. In the call for papers for this thematic section, it was emphasized that both the Balkans and Central Europe are often perceived as transitional areas and peripheries to Western or Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean or the Orient. However, this peripherality on many levels (cultural, political and otherwise) has not hindered the formation of an identity for these regions, nor a coherent concept of what it means to be Balkan, Central or Eastern European. The works of Jenő Szűcs (1995), Larry Wolff (1994) or Maria Todorova (1997) can be mentioned here as the best-known attempts to define these identities. The articles we received as feedback to our call for papers develop many of the above themes further, but also highlight new problems. Most of the contributions deal with the space of the Balkans and Central Europe (which were mentioned in the theme of the thematic section), but some deal with the ideas of Europeanness and the Orient in relation to the other transitional spaces.

The first contribution in the thematic section is by Jarosław Buniowski and deals with the question of colonization according to Wallachian law

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(*Ius Valachicum*), a practice that was applied throughout Central Europe and the Balkans. From the late Middle Ages onwards, Vlach pastoral communities (not always of Romance, but often of Slavic ethnicity) were used to colonize border areas. This peripheral nature of the border areas can be understood here in two ways – in the local context of the Sandomierz region, about which the author writes, but also in the broader context of the borderlands of Central and South-Eastern Europe at that time. The second paper, whose author is the undersigned initiator of this thematic section, concerns the border regions in South-Eastern Europe and the Slavic shepherds, who were called Vlachs because of their social status, albeit at a later time and space than the first paper, which is Dalmatia under the French rule at the beginning of the 19th century. The view of the French administrators which was analyzed in the paper took into account the perspective of border areas and peripheries in the new Enlightenment view of the antinomy of backwardness and progress, which in the context of Dalmatia coincided with the border between Western Europe and the Balkans (or Eastern Europe).

The third text by Krzysztof Latawiec is dedicated to the military and civilian corps that functioned in the western peripheries of the Tsarist Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This topic is a part of extremely interesting problem of the perception of the borders of Eastern Europe, which overlapped with those of Russia at the time. Although Eastern Europe (as presented by Larry Wolff) was portrayed as the periphery of the West, from the point of view of Russian imperialism it was the political center, and the former Polish territories, which otherwise belonged to the Central European area, could be considered periphery in this context. Interestingly, in the 19th century, Central Europe could be seen not only as the periphery of Russia, but also as the periphery of Prussia and the Habsburg Empire. This latter issue is addressed in the other text of the thematic section, titled *Promoting Habsburg cultural identity to secondary school pupils in late Austrian-ruled Bukovina: A case study of the First Imperial and Royal Gymnasium in Czernowitz*. Its author, Antony Hoyte-West, addresses the themes of education and the state propaganda in the northeastern periphery of the Habsburg Empire.

Some articles refer to the problem of the center-periphery relationship in the context of literary history. The center could, for example, be understood as a certain canon of works and authors that are important for the creation of national culture. Such a perspective was analyzed by Damian Kubik, who dealt with the Dubrovnik tradition and its place in the context of the culture of Serbia. His article attempts to discuss the status of Dubrovnik and its

literary and cultural tradition in the discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries in the context of Serbian literary history. The starting point for the considerations is the opinion of Jovan Deretić, who regarded the Dubrovnik tradition as “borderline” and described it as “a tradition of subordinate importance” for the Serbian cultural and literary system. The other article in the thematic section, written by Tomasz Ewertowski, deals with the history of literature and examines the question of the relationship between center and periphery in a broader context of Europeanness treated as a center. The paper analyzes various dimensions of European identity in Polish and Serbian accounts of travels to Asia between the 1850s and 1920s. Based on several case studies, the analysis shows how the travelers often defined themselves as Europeans, but problematized various aspects of such identification.

The last two contributions of the thematic section focus on the relationship between center and periphery, on the broader ideas of Europeanness or the Orient, and show that the transitional character of the Balkans or Central Europe can also be shared by some other areas directly bordering the European East. The first of these regions is Georgia, a country that was long considered part of Eastern Europe, as it was part of the Russian Tsarist Empire and later the USSR. However, in the short period between 1918 and 1921, Georgia functioned as an independent state, and the author of the next contribution, Vazha Shatberashvili, described its cultural policy and showed how, after the dissolution of the Romanov regime, the Georgian intelligentsia prepared a solid ground for the development of national culture, which governance was based on the rules largely adopted from the West. The last contribution in the thematic section, written by Karolina Pawlik, deals with the work of the Chinese artist Pan Jianfeng, who lives in Finland, another land that – like Georgia – was under Russian influence for a long time, but is now perceived as part of Western Europe. The contribution shows an artist’s attempt to abstract from the anatomy of the West and the East (which is perceived not only as Eastern Europe, but also as the Orient). Based on interviews conducted with Pan and texts from different eras and circles, this paper shows that the assumption that there are strictly definable boundaries between cultures is sometimes unfounded. Such an approach is also an interesting point of reference for the whole question of the relationship between center and periphery and an important final accent of the whole thematic section.

In resuming this short introduction it should be underlined that the majority of the papers which might be found in this year’s *Colloquia*



Humanistica issue refer to the external and internal image of Central Europe and the Balkans not only in a broad context, but also to the axis of center and periphery understood on a smaller scale. Social, ethnic, and religious identities were often formed on the axis of the center (economically prosperous areas, cities, centers of high culture, religious centers) and the periphery (economically backward areas, provinces, the world of culture and traditional beliefs). The vectors of the center-periphery axis in local terms sometimes coincided with the more general conditions of East-West relations, but often constituted a quality in themselves. Overall, the whole thematic section allowed to examine the formation of collective and individual identities (and their external perception) in the context of different points of reference: the nearest city, or center of worship, or broader ideas of Europeanness, Balkanness, or the Orient.

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Note

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